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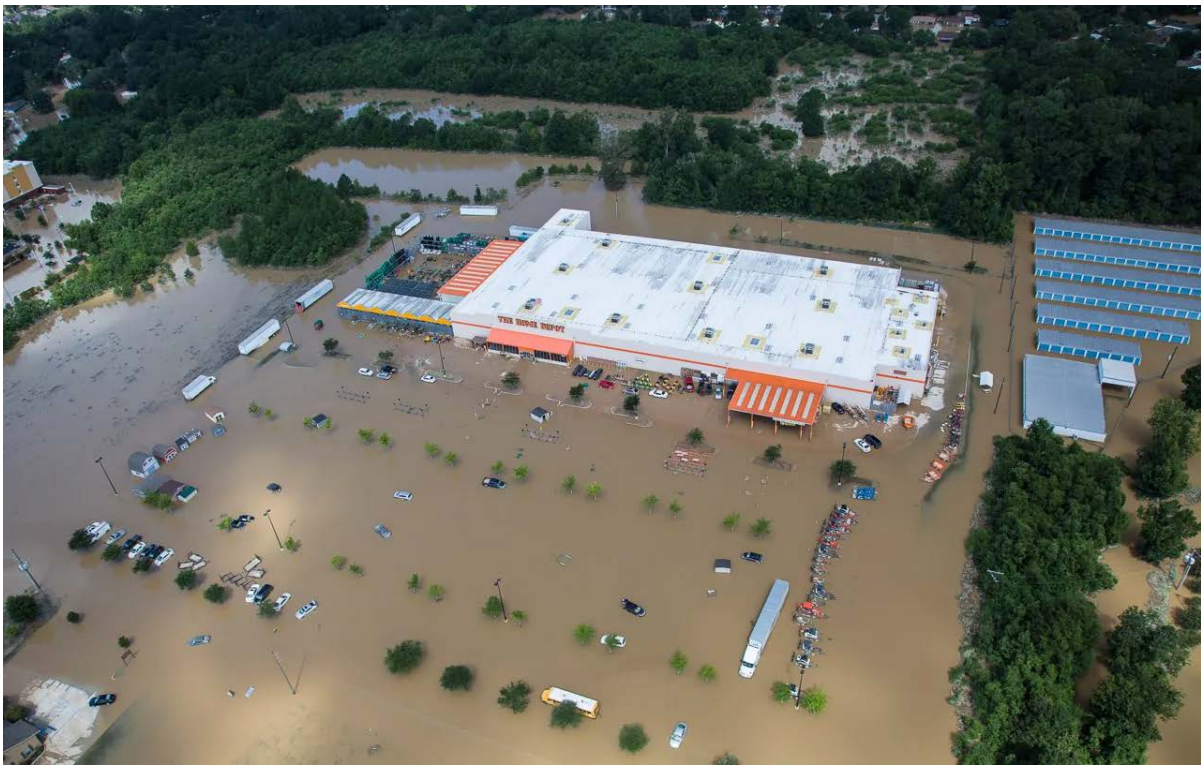
CLIMATE CHANGE, SUSTAINABILITY

# Wading through the aftermath of Louisiana's 1,000-year flood

by Julie Dermansky  
September 26, 2016



Home after home is underwater in the Livingston Parish devastation. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal



A Home Depot in Livingston Parish, Baton Rouge, is submerged on Aug. 15 after record-breaking flooding caused by more than 2 feet of rain over 48 hours. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal







Mary Bradford, a widowed 78-year-old, cleans the gutted house she has lived in for more than 30 years about five weeks after the flood. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

**Mary Bradford invited me into her gutted home in Baton Rouge earlier this month after she saw me taking pictures of the pile of her discarded household items. It had been five weeks since the 1,000-year flood hit southern Louisiana.**





Floodwaters make Interstate 10 impassable on Aug. 15. The highway, which connects Baton Rouge to New Orleans, was closed in the days following the storm. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal





Residents in Paulina, Louisiana, say they were able to keep floodwater out of their homes with sandbags and pumps going around the clock. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

The flood was caused by a storm that dropped up to 29 inches of rain in some areas in less than 48 hours and caused rivers to crest at record-breaking heights.







Three people in Denham Springs, Louisiana, encounter a cow that lost its way on Aug. 15. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal





A Denham Springs supermarket remains flooded on Sept. 15, weeks after historic rainfall. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal



A rusted casket sits unearthed at a flooded cemetery in Zachary, Louisiana, on Aug. 20. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

Statistically, a flood of these proportions has a .001 chance of happening in any given year, which is why it's called a **1,000-year flood**. The rain, along with questionable water-management decisions, made this flood a disaster that the Red Cross deemed the worst in the United States since Hurricane Sandy struck the East Coast.





Roxanna Johnson, of East Fairlane, a Baton Rouge subdivision, discusses on Aug. 19 being rescued by boat during the storm. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

Many of the homes that were flooded in the Baton Rouge area still have contents and debris that haven't been hauled away, according to the **Baton Rouge Advocate**.

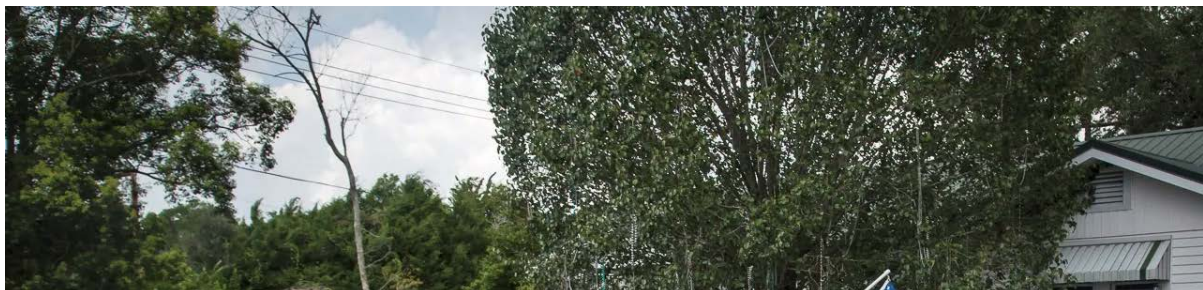






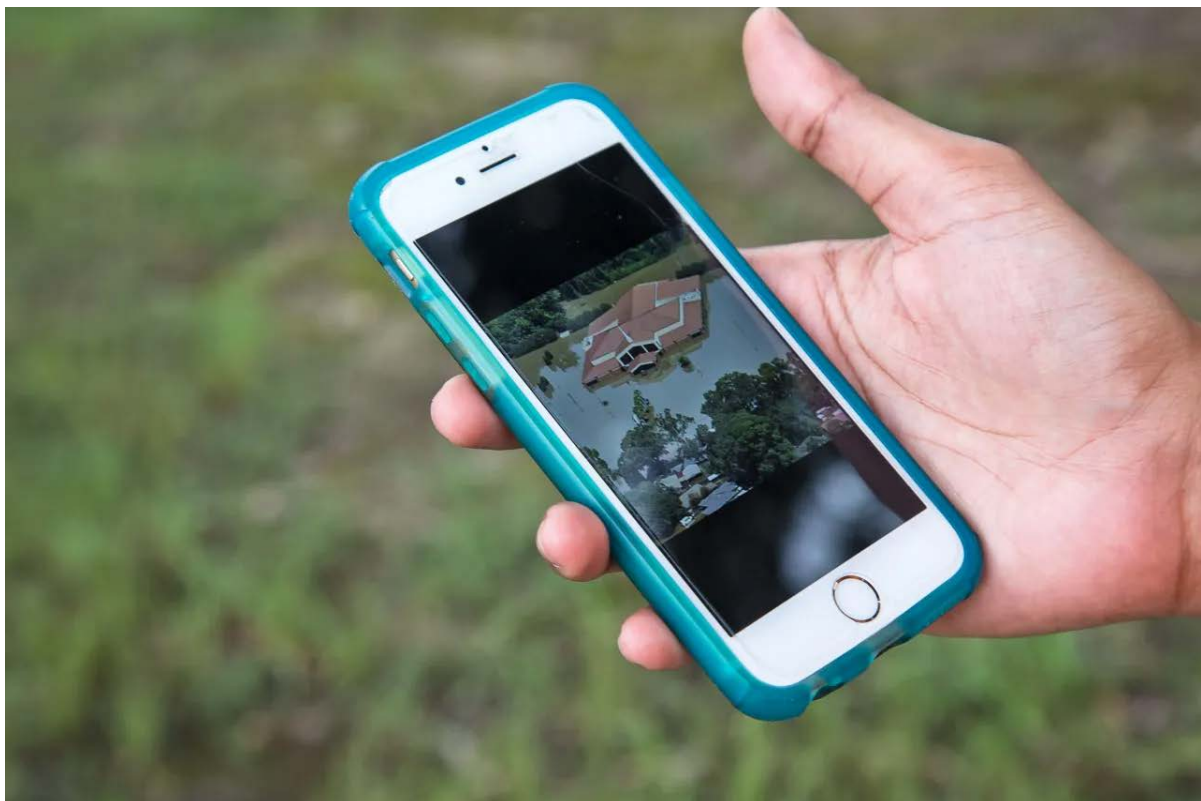
Piles of belongings line the streets in Denham Springs, Louisiana, on Sept. 1 as homeowners hold on to hope that they'll be able to rebuild. A dancing Santa is getting "his last dance," said homeowner Lisa Herbert. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

**Bradford considers herself luckier than most. She has flood insurance and she was able to get family, friends and volunteers from local churches to gut her house within the first week of the flood.**





An American flag hangs above floodwater in Sorrento, Louisiana, on Aug. 20 as a girl clutches her doll.  
Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal



Tamara Williams' cellphone shows a picture of the flooded Baton Rouge church where a funeral was held



for slain Baton Rouge police officer Montrell Jackson. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

All the same, “It gets overwhelming because it goes on day after day after day, and there is no relief,” Bradford told me. Her eyes teared up as she explained how difficult it is to look at the “piles of stuff in the front – all of your memories.”



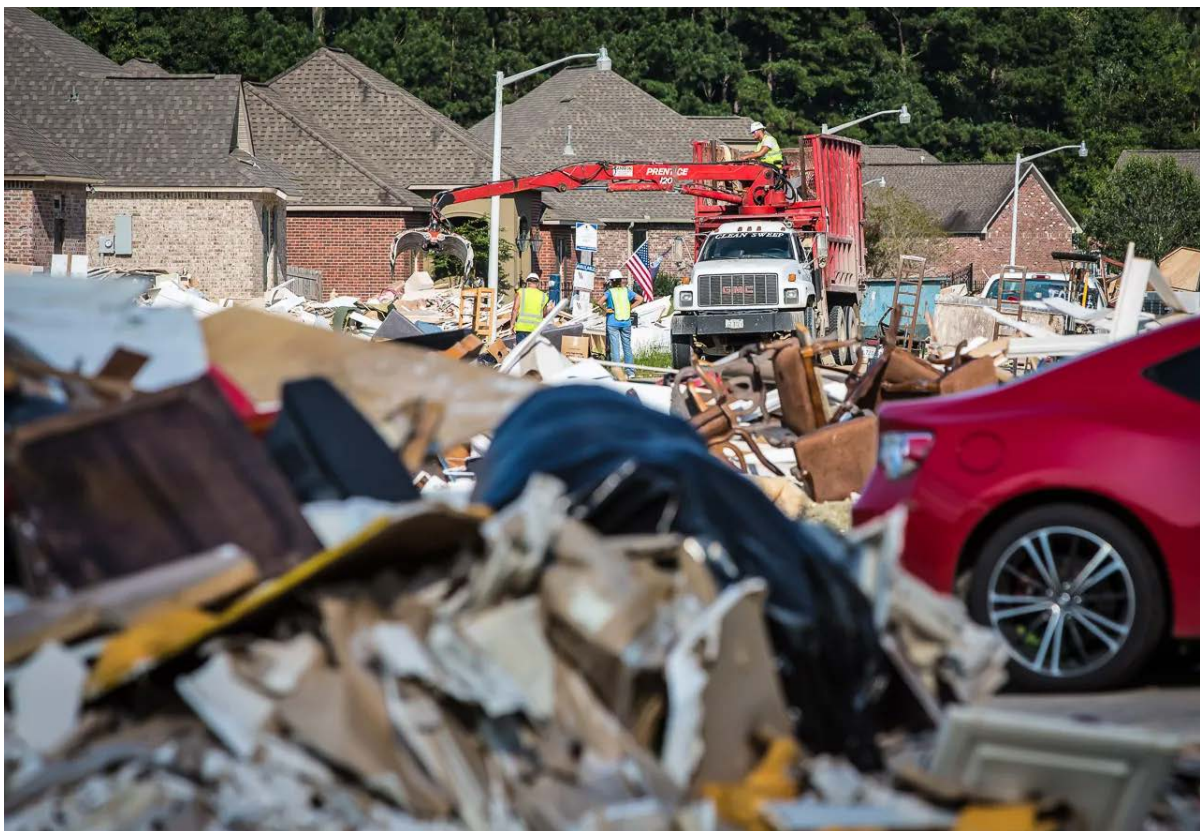
Carletta Cannon surveys the extensive damage to her home and belongings on Sept. 3 in the Townhomes of Sherwood Forest complex in Baton Rouge. Cannon has been displaced by the flood and said all of her clothes were destroyed. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

Once search and rescue was over, people started looking for explanations about why many areas that never flooded before did so this time.

**In Walker, Louisiana**, Mayor Rick Ramsey said he is planning to sue the state and federal government for building a dividing wall on Interstate 12 that he

believes acted as a dam for the rainwater during the storm. **Video shot** during the storm showed water hitting the wall and being pushed into the city instead of flowing across the interstate. Had the divider not been built, he contends, much of the flooding would have been averted.

Bradford, **some local officials** and residents in the Baton Rouge area question if their homes would have been spared if the state had finished the Comite River diversion canal, a project government officials have talked about for 33 years.



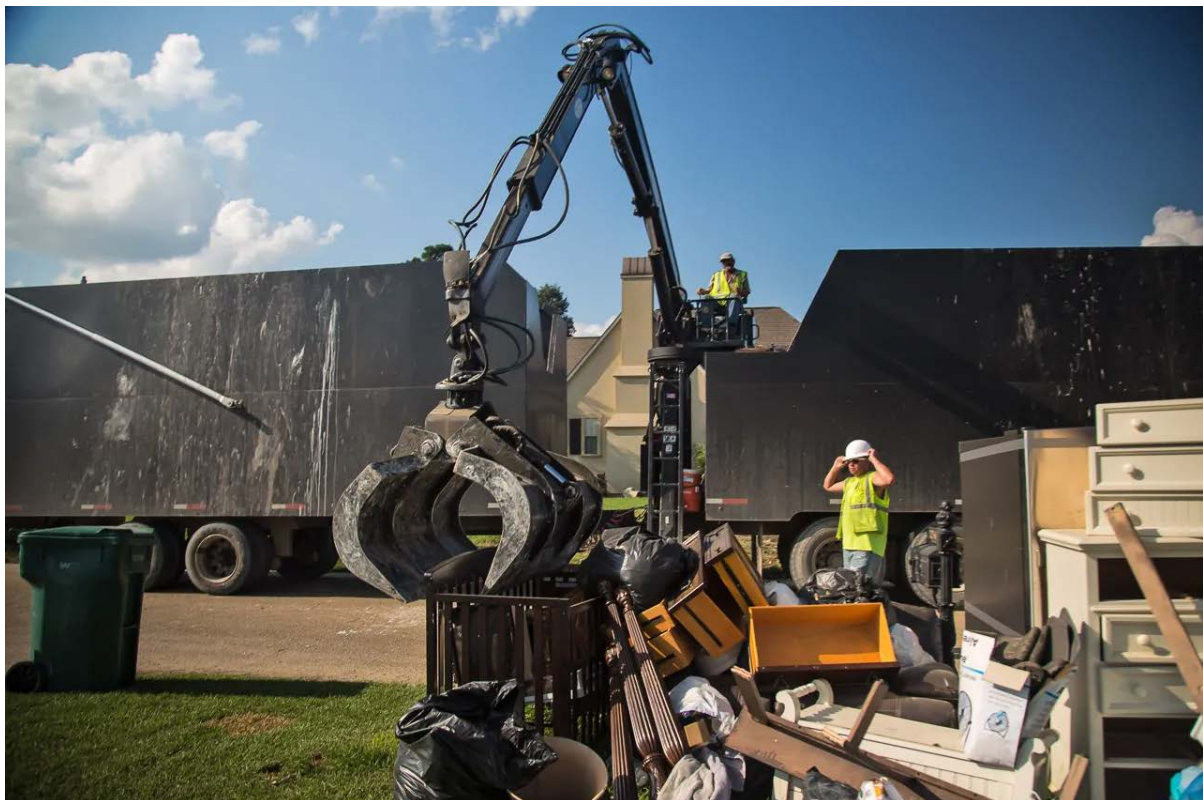
A cleanup crew sets about clearing debris from Walker, Louisiana. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal  
Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal







A temporary landfill creates a mountain of storm debris on Sept. 15 in Baton Rouge. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal





Terry Dougan (on crane), a disaster cleanup worker from Arkansas, is one in an army of workers from around the country who came to the Baton Rouge area to help with the massive relief effort. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

I started photographing the aftermath of the flood on August 14, when the rain began to taper off. It was a month after Baton Rouge's racial tensions made national news following the police shooting death of Alton Sterling and the killing of three officers by a lone gunman.



Community activist Gary Chambers, who has led a call for justice in the Baton Rouge community following the police shooting death of Alton Sterling, visits the mostly black neighborhood of Glen Oaks, where most homes were flooded. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

Community activist Gary Chambers, publisher of the **Rouge Collection**, said he is continuing to fight for justice for Alton Sterling and now doing what he can to help the African-American community recover from both hardships.







Still backflow water sits trapped in Assumption Parish, Louisiana, on Sept. 2. The local government made cuts in a road to give the water a path to drain. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal





A vehicle remains stuck in flooded Ascension Parish, Louisiana, on Aug. 27. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

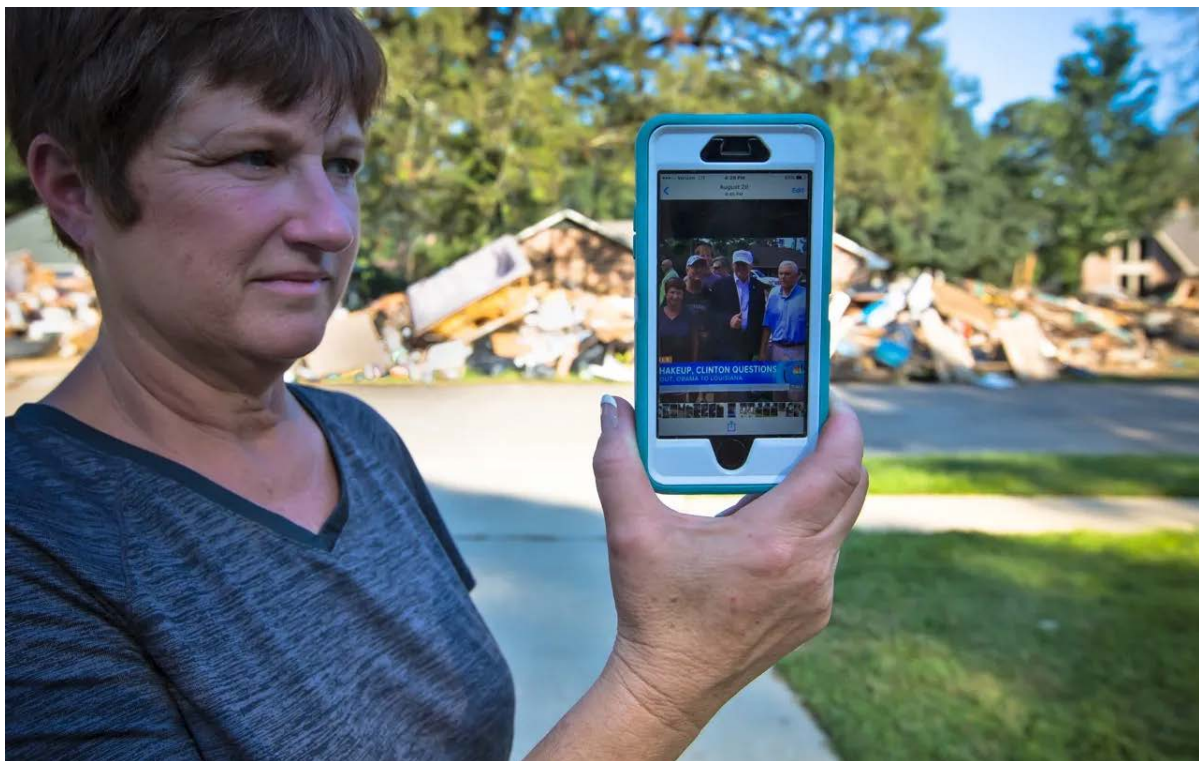
“We have an abundance of issues to fix,” Chambers said on his [\*\*Facebook Live feed\*\*](#). Among them is the issue of where potentially toxic storm debris would be dumped. Two of the sites officials picked impact African-American communities: a [\*\*long-controversial landfill\*\*](#) in Alsen, north of Baton Rouge, and a temporary landfill next to Monticello, on the city’s east side.







Leroy James, of East Fairlane, said he and his family will do their best to fix their home because they have nowhere else to go. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal



Zanie Whitehead shows a photo on Sunday of Donald Trump's Aug. 19 visit to Chaperral Drive in Denham

Springs. Heaps of debris and belongings remain on the street six weeks after the flood. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

Despite the pain caused by the flooding, there are signs of humor and faith in the wreckage. A couple of homeowners deemed themselves winners of the “Yard of the Month,” and in Central, in East Baton Rouge Parish, I spotted some spray-painted neon smiley faces.

Aaron Sutton, standing outside his flooded Baton Rouge home on Sunday, compares the aftermath of the flood with Marine boot camp. Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal Credit: Julie Dermansky for Reveal

American flags on porches and the tops of junk piles raise the question: Did those who survived the flood win a battle or live to fight another day?

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